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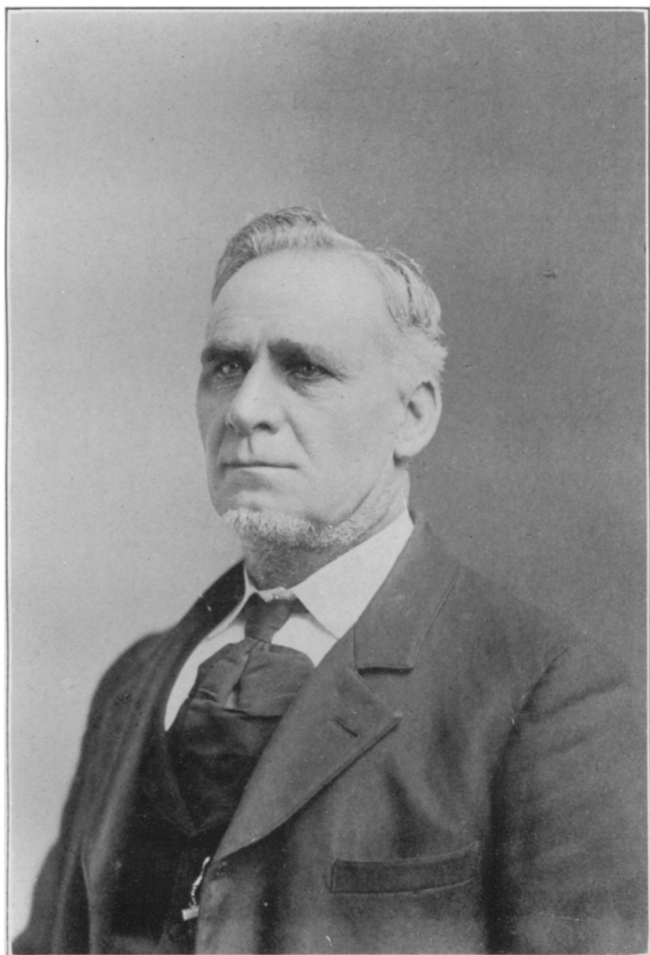
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THE DUTCH SETTLEMENTS OF SHEBOYGAN COUNTY

BY SIPKO F. REDERUS

Dutch settlements have never been numerous in America or in any other country not flying the Dutch flag. The Hollanders, unlike their German and British neighbors, have no natural inclination to roaming and adventure; and being strongly attached to their native soil they have preferred attempting to improve conditions at home to hazarding their fortune in a foreign country. This love of country has changed the Netherlands from a boggy land to a beautiful, productive country with an intelligent, industrious, and artistic people now numbering about six millions.

Unusual conditions, political, economic, and religious, have, however, from time to time caused Hollanders to emigrate to foreign lands, and during the decade 1840-50 many set sail for the United States. After the fall of Napoleon the Netherlands had changed from a republican to a limited monarchical form of government. Belgium reunited with Holland under the name of Kingdom of Netherlands, with William I, son of the former Dutch stadtholder, as king. The union was not successful, and the rebellion of 1830, which resulted in the separation of Holland and Belgium, necessitated large armies which William I kept up for years in the hope of reconquering Belgium. Then in 1825 an inundation of the ocean swept away the dikes, devastated the land, and left thousands homeless and without resources. With the abdication of William I and the accession of his son, William II, conditions did not improve. War and flood turned the thoughts of the suffering lower and middle classes to emigration, and the period from 1840 to 1850 saw the great exodus of Dutch to America.



PETER DAAN

Pioneer Dutch Settler in Oostburg, Sheboygan County, Wisconsin

Religious difficulties arising at this time also caused the emigration of several distinct groups. With the separation of Holland from Spain came separation from the civil and religious rule of the Catholic Church and the adoption of the Reformed Church by the State. The Dutch Reformed Church was Calvinistic in doctrine and Presbyterian in government. German philosophy and French liberalism gradually influenced the lives of members of the State Church; and the monarch and other governmental officers being friendly toward the new thought, the church synods permitted certain changes in the service and doctrine. Again and again the orthodox party tried to overthrow the new order, and after many failures in such attempts left the established church to form a separate ecclesiastical body called the Free Separate Reformed Church.

The civil government, fearing that civil revolution would follow this religious upheaval, opposed the new church, forbade meetings, and fined ministers. With the accession of William II the organization was recognized as a corporate body, but many restrictions were imposed upon it and financial aid, granted other denominations, was refused it. A large number of the Separatists gladly accepted the terms imposed, but others, smarting under the restrictions and foreseeing no relief in the near future, resolved to emigrate to America.

Three separate parties, each under a prominent minister, were formed for the purpose of founding settlements in the United States. Rev. R. C. Van Raalte led his people to the eastern shore of Lake Michigan, where they founded settlements which later came to be among the prosperous communities of Michigan. Among them are Holland, where Hope College was founded, Grand Haven, Muskegon, and Grand Rapids.

Under Rev. H. P. Scholte a party of Dutch immigrants went to southern Iowa and settled a large tract of land

purchased from the government. The city of Pella, where Central College is located, is the center of a number of communities, all of which have prosperous industries and beautiful churches of the Reformed faith.

The party led by Rev. P. Zonne secured by purchase from the government a section of country bordering on Lake Michigan, some twenty miles south of the present city of Sheboygan. The settlers arrived in the spring of 1847 after a stormy voyage across the Atlantic, making the journey inland by way of the Hudson River, Erie Canal, and Great Lakes. In settling this region the Zonne party had been preceded by other Dutch families. In 1844 Lawrence Zuvelt and his family settled in a locality four and one-half miles northwest of what later became the Zonne settlement, and in 1846 they were joined by G. H. Koltsée and John Boland and their families.

A tragic event marked the growth of this settlement. In 1848 the *Mayflower*, filled with immigrants to Wisconsin, including many Hollanders, had proceeded as far as Sheboygan when fire was discovered. When, in spite of the crew's efforts, the flames seemed to be gaining headway, a panic ensued, and many lost their lives in the fire or in the water. Others were landed in pitiful condition on the shores of Wisconsin. Three Hollanders, Wilterdenk, Oonk, and Rensink by name, were among those rescued. Wilterdenk had lost his wife and six children in the catastrophe.

The Zonne community rapidly overtook the earlier settlement in size and development. Cedar Grove was the name given it by Reverend Zonne, because cedar formed the greatest part of the forest near by, in portions of which the Indians still lived. The land was ideal for the painter, poet, and hunter, but the matter-of-fact Hollanders, though belonging to a race which had produced great artists, writers, and explorers, had not come to dream, paint pictures, or follow the chase. The land was valued by the settlers as a

means of material improvement; the forest was an obstacle and had to be removed. The work of destruction went on systematically from season to season, and in a short time large clearings could be seen on which were planted maize, wheat, and barley. All of these grains gave rich return, for the soil was fertile and not easily exhausted.

Clearing the ground for the first crop, however, was a difficult process. How to remove the trees after they had been felled with such difficulty was a problem. The settlers could not use all the wood for fuel nor could they convert the tree trunks into lumber. To dispose of the superabundance of wood, these pioneer farmers had to set it on fire, being careful to remove the immense pile to a safe distance from the forest and from the buildings already erected. The hardwood tree stumps remaining in the fields after the trees had been cut were a great obstacle to cultivation of the ground. Digging the stumps out of the field was a long process, and explosives or machinery for doing this work were not then available.

The forest, however, was a help as well as a hindrance. From the logs were made houses and barns, agricultural implements, wagons, and, to some extent, furniture. The forest possessed an abundance of game, wild blackberries, strawberries, wild grapes, and maple trees from which the settlers secured their sugar. Autumn brought a harvest of hickorynuts and walnuts. Cattle thrived in the woodland, and in certain parts flocks of sheep could be kept. From the wool the housewife knitted stockings and wove the homespun for the family clothing.

Communication with other settlements was extremely difficult. For many years the Indian trails and the pathways blazed by the settlers were the only roads, tortuous at all times but almost impassable in winter. The principal trading posts, such as Port Washington and Milwaukee, were far distant from the Zonne settlement—Milwaukee being forty-five

miles away—and under the best circumstances the slow-moving oxen made a long journey of it. Often the wagons broke down in the middle of the forest and the men would have to leave their loads in the road and go back home or to the trading post ahead for assistance. The lack of communication was felt most during sickness and especially epidemics, for many a time the physician, after a long, hard journey, would arrive to find his patient dead or beyond help.

Such were the difficulties with which these Dutch pioneers contended during the first years of their colonization. Their energy and perseverance, however, defeated one after another. Gradually the farms were cleared, the newly established sawmills turned out lumber for better houses and barns; waterpower was utilized for the running of flour mills; and stores were established within easy distance. Artisans joined the settlements, although blacksmiths had been found among the original settlers. As the forest gradually disappeared, old trails were widened, roads were laid out, villages sprang up, and post offices were established.

But in the midst of their growing prosperity the black war cloud gathered on the southern horizon and cast its shadows over this peaceful community. Many of the men, whose fathers had obtained liberty after eighty years of conflict, were aroused, and leaving their plows took up the musket. Sad times now followed, for now and then the news reached the settlement that some son or father had died in battle; but after the years of sorrow the laureled heroes returned to their firesides and a greater prosperity dawned.

One of the men who was conspicuous in the conflict and even more so in the days of peace that followed was Peter Daan. He was born in the Netherlands, in the town of Westkapelle, Province of Zeeland, March 26, 1835. When he was seven years of age his parents emigrated to America and settled in the town of Pultneyville, New York. Later the family moved to Wisconsin and bought a farm in Sheboygan

County, near the present village of Oostburg. Peter Daan was one of the first to volunteer on the outbreak of the war, and through his influence and effort caused many to follow his example. In 1867 he commenced his mercantile business on the Sauk Trail, two and one-half miles east of Oostburg. As that town developed, he moved his business there, built a large store, an elevator, a steam flour mill, and later founded the bank of which he became president. He held that office until his death. The people, having confidence in his ability and good judgment, several times elected him president of the town. For years he held the office of justice of the peace, and because of his amicable manner of settling disputes he won the title among the people of "the peacemaker."

As a young man he became a member of the Presbyterian Church, and later was made an elder, an office which he held until he died. Several times his presbytery elected him delegate to the higher ecclesiastical councils. In 1873 he was chosen a member of the Wisconsin legislative assembly. His death occurred June 14, 1914.

After the Civil War the settlements entered a period of prosperity greater than any experienced before; in fact many of the farmers, receiving high prices for their products during the war, laid the foundation of their wealth in this period. The villages of Oostburg and Cedar Grove expanded, and the new town of Gibbsville was founded three miles west of Oostburg. There a large flour mill, driven by water power, was built, and remains in operation to this day. East of Cedar Grove, on the lake shore, was built a pier where the great vessels could land. The settlement of Amsterdam, which developed here, became an important trading place for a time but was abandoned when the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad entered the territory. Oostburg and Cedar Grove, in both of which stations were erected, received the benefit of the improved communication. Grain elevators and business houses of all kinds were erected, and residences

increased and improved. In the country better farmhouses and more spacious barns rapidly replaced the primitive log buildings. The acreage of land cleared, fenced in, and cultivated, increased, and the herds of cattle and flocks of sheep became more numerous. Along the lake shore a profitable fishing industry was developed. Everywhere the result of hard work and thrift was seen. *Luctor et emergo* (I struggle and rise higher), the motto of the Province of Zeeland from which these Dutch settlers had come, represented the achievements of these people as well as those of their sturdy ancestors.

In the midst of their hard struggle for material improvement these people had not been neglectful of religious matters. Upon their arrival, under the leadership of Reverend Zonne they had organized themselves into a church and united with the Presbyterian organization. In the following year, 1848, Reverend Zonne built a house of worship on his own estate and gave it to his congregation. This church, built about a mile north of the present site of Cedar Grove, was the first of the Presbyterian denomination in that region. In the course of time another house of worship was built in the settlement later known as Cedar Grove by those who were not in harmony with Reverend Zonne. This congregation united with the old Dutch Reformed Church of America, founded in New Amsterdam (now New York) in the eighteenth century. This is the oldest and wealthiest (in proportion to size) of all ecclesiastical bodies in America.

In 1853 another Presbyterian church was built four and one-half miles north of Cedar Grove on the Sauk Trail. Reverend Van de Schurn was the first pastor and Peter Daan the first elder. This church with its large membership is flourishing today under the pastorate of Rev. C. Van Griethuizen. A Dutch Reformed church was later established at the same place, and others of the same denomination were

erected in the settlement later becoming the village of Oostburg, and in Gibbsville.

All these churches were in the beginning unpretentious log structures; but as the people began to amass wealth, the old churches were replaced by substantial, attractive buildings surmounted by spires or towers for the church bells. Comfortable residences for the pastors have been erected on the church premises. All the congregations are flourishing today; and although they profess far more liberal views than their ancestors, the descendants of the early pioneers are equally devoted to these institutions.

Of all these churches, the one founded by Reverend Zonne has always been the most prominent, not only because it has the largest membership but because it possesses greater historic associations. The second edifice of this organization, a plain frame building without a tower, was replaced in 1882 by a much larger and more attractive building, the gift of a pioneer member, J. Lammers. The church is a picturesque landmark whose spire can be seen for miles. The interior has been considerably improved of late, and a pipe organ has recently been installed. An old churchyard is at one side of the church, and here lie the remains of the Reverend Zonne and many other early worthies of the church.

The organization has always had a prosperous record, but its greatest growth began in 1882 when Rev. J. J. W. Roth began his pastorate of more than thirty-two years. Reverend Roth was born in Capetown, South Africa. There he received his collegiate training; and, later coming to America with his father, he studied theology at the McCormick Institute at Chicago, where he was graduated and ordained in 1878. After serving two small churches in Minnesota and Wisconsin, he became pastor of the Presbyterian Church at Cedar Grove. During the first year of his ministry the present church was built, and under his pastorate the congregation became strong and prosperous. Since the young people had

become deficient in the language of their fathers, the introduction of English into the services had become a necessity. Dr. Roth, educated to both languages, preached to his people in both tongues. On May 1, 1914, Dr. Roth was stricken by apoplexy and remained unconscious for some days. Although he recovered consciousness, he lost the power of speech and the use of his limbs, and was compelled to end his active services. Since his illness he has lived in retirement in Cedar Grove.

Dr. Roth is a man of scholarly attainment, being proficient in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek, and an artist of some ability. The church societies, all of which he founded, are in a flourishing condition. He was for years the leading man in the Milwaukee presbytery, and was several times elected its moderator and delegate to higher ecclesiastical councils. He has been succeeded by Rev. P. Van Straten.

During the past twenty years the growth of the Dutch settlements has been remarkable. The village of Cedar Grove has grown into a thriving town with many prosperous business houses, grain elevators, and factories. It has a large public school, and a classical academy which is conducted by the Dutch Reformed Church of America. The bank of Cedar Grove is a flourishing institution founded some ten years ago. The deposits are over \$300,000.

The village of Oostburg has likewise prospered. Peter Daan's flour mill has been enlarged; implement, canning, cheese, and condensed milk factories have been built. Oostburg and Cedar Grove are connected with each other, Sheboygan, and Milwaukee by the hourly service of the Milwaukee Northern Electric Railway. Returns from the planting of wheat, to which the farmers had devoted their principal attention had gradually decreased, and barley and rye are being substituted, also peas and beans which are sold to the canning factories. Many of the farmers, however, have turned to cattle raising, dairying, and cheese making as prin-

cipal agricultural enterprises. In the making of cheese the Hollanders of Sheboygan County are recognized as experts and their brands are among the best in the state.

Always interested in intellectual progress, the Dutch settlers have built and supported excellent schools, and many are sending their sons and daughters to colleges. Materially these people have prospered since the first band of settlers began to hew down the forest in 1847. The thoroughness with which they did cut down all timber is being regretted at present by those who possess land bare of all but a few trees. This generation, however, is planting trees which, it is hoped, will soon remedy that great defect.

In customs and manner of thinking the new generation differs greatly from the pioneers who started to develop the country. Their language is fast disappearing in public and in the homes, for only in the church is Dutch even partly used. This may be due to the similarity between the Dutch and the Anglo-Saxon languages which have a common factor in the Fresian tongue.

The similarity of tongues and, in addition, of the political, religious, and economic struggles of the Dutch and the English settlers in America has caused the Dutch to be readily absorbed into the earlier population. The special characteristics, in addition to those common to both English and Dutch, make the Dutch element one of the most valuable in the state of Wisconsin.